

NEWS RELEASE

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DeNUCCI SAYS \$19M IN BIG DIG COSTS COULD HAVE BEEN AVOIDED

State Auditor Joe DeNucci said today that design delays related to construction of the Big Dig's Fort Point Channel crossing resulted in an additional \$19 million in costs that could have been avoided.

DeNucci said the timetable was unnecessarily thrown off schedule by the failure of the Massachusetts Highway Department to quickly settle debates surrounding major design issues. This process was delayed by the reluctance of the Big Dig's management consultant to consider design changes urged by contractors and the federal government. As a result, the job is already a year behind its original schedule and is unlikely to be finished until late next year.

Workers recently lowered the first of six tunnel sections into the Fort Point Channel. The project involves construction of tunnels under the South Station railroad tracks, over the MBTA's Red Line and between the U.S. Postal Annex and the Gillette Company, eventually connecting Interstates 90 and 93 with the Ted Williams Tunnel.

According to DeNucci's office, the channel crossing project was delayed because Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff, the Big Dig's management consultant, did not want to consider alternative design changes recommended by design and geotechnical contractors concerning the excavation support system. The contractors raised their concerns after learning of a soil instability problem under the Fort Point Channel. This debate continued for more than 18 months, before an alternative excavation support plan was finally selected.

An independent consultant concluded that six of these 18 months were unproductive because Bechtel/Parsons was reluctant to consider weaknesses in its original plan and resisted giving due consideration to the concerns raised by the other contractors. This delay added approximately \$13 million to the Big Dig's tab because of construction costs that were increased by inflation.

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DeNucci's report revealed that the other major delay involved design of the ramp leading from I-93 to I-90 and the Ted Williams Tunnel. Federal highway officials maintained that the ramp's left-hand entrance forced an undesirable two-sided weave that jeopardized the safety of traffic further down I-90. The design dispute dragged on for almost three years before the realignment was satisfactorily settled. This delay added about \$6.4 million in redesign work to the project's total expense.

DeNucci's audit noted that the job was subsequently split into two contracts, with a third contract added in an attempt to overcome the soil instability problem. As a result, the opening of the I-90 roadway has been delayed from its original date of late 1998 until December 2001.

In their response, Big Dig officials contended that there were no unnecessary expenses and that the project would have been "dramatically more expensive" had they waited to implement alternative designs. DeNucci replied that his concern was not with the eventual solution to the problem, but rather with the lengthy amount of time it took for a resolution.

This audit is DeNucci's 10th in a series of interim reports on the Big Dig. Originally scheduled for completion in 1998 at a total cost of \$4.4 billion, it is now estimated that the work will not be finished until 2005 and the price could soar to \$12.2 billion according to the Big Dig's latest estimate.

